

Intro: Music (Hancock County, TN)

Gerald Hawkins, Owner G + H Foods

I was in the U.S. army and I served in Europe. I was there for 32 months between 1959 and 1962. I volunteered. Never been sorry a day in my life that I went in. The best thing that ever happened to me. It created a lot of structure in my life that's served me well throughout my life.

How I got started in the salsa business was that my oldest daughter married a fellow of Hispanic heritage and I love to garden and he knew how to make salsa. The salsa recipe came out of his father's family. It was over a hundred year old recipe. He got me started to making salsa and unfortunately we didn't really come together on the heat of the salsa, its too hot for me to eat. So I taught him to garden and he taught me to make salsa. So I was giving away probably a hundred to two hundred jars of salsa every summer and I kept getting encouraged by everybody to "You need to put this on the market.", "This is the best salsa we've ever eaten." I modified the recipe to the American palette. So I took a leap of faith and that's pretty much how it started.

The reason we selected Hancock county as a production facility was because this is the second poorest county in the state of Tennessee. There's a large labor force here. The textile industry has moved out, tobacco is no longer a viable for farmers. So, we felt like, or I felt like it would be an excellent way to do two things; produce my product and to provide work for people in really and dire straits. The importance of our being in this area, is that it gives people a place to go to work. It's easy to draw welfare or food stamps but I know deep down in peoples' heart they would rather be productive, they would rather be earning what they get.

We started sending product weekly to the soldiers in Iraq and to Afghanistan in January of this year when I was contacted by a lady with a Adopt-A-Platoon. She had been purchasing, unbeknownst to me, had been purchasing the salsa at the Wal-Mart store in Oakridge, TN. Of course when I found out what she was doing, I told her that she didn't have to buy salsa anymore, obviously. I gave her all the salsa. In fact, I got involved in the shipping and now we ship regularly to the troops. The advice I would give anyone disabled, veteran or otherwise, is perseverance and believe in what you're doing and be persistent and don't give up, hang on. Because it will happen if you keep working.